

EXCERPT FROM VNI CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY AND PROCEDURES

4.2 Evaluation of Funding Applications

4.2.1 Background

During the evaluation of funding applications, the VNI will comply with the conflict of interest procedures established by the NH&MRC of Australia. The VNI is committed to fair review of all grant applications ensuring any Conflicts of Interest are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour. The essence of a quality peer review process demands all participants act in good faith, in an open and sensible manner. VNI acknowledges that there are many forms of Conflict of Interest. It is an important fundamental of the peer review process that people within the field have access to other grant applications. This is a privilege not to be abused and reviewers must act in accordance with these guidelines and accepted international practices in peer review. It is imperative that the grant review process is diligently monitored and documented regarding potential and real Conflicts of Interest.

Following are the principal areas where conflicts may arise during the Evaluation Process:

- a) Direct involvement in the application as Chief Investigator or Associate/Principle Investigator.
- b) Direct or potential involvement due to a personal financial interest in the outcome of the granting process.
- c) Potential involvement as a scientific¹, or departmental/ institutional colleague².
- d) Perceived involvement due to a family/ personal relationship, either currently or during the past five years.
- e) If at any time there has been a verbal or written dispute between an applicant and the individual acting for the VNI.
- f) Any other perceived conflicts.

4.2.2 Procedures

The following procedures will apply for managing conflicts of interest in the VNI Evaluation Process:

- a) When formally accepting a place on an Evaluation Committee (EC) or as a reviewer, VNI Associates sign a document agreeing to abide by the policies and guidelines determined by the VNI;
- b) The VNI will provide all EC members and reviewers with information on investigators and institutes involved in applications being reviewed by that

1 a scientific colleague is defined as another scientist with whom the collaborator has published papers, held grants or acted in a Higher Degree by Research student/Supervisor relationship with any of the applicants during the past five years.

2 a colleague within an identifiable organisational group from which joint benefit may follow award of the grant, ie. Members of the same Research Institute or affiliated University Department, Faculty or Hospital.

individual. The EC members and reviewers are to review this information and provide the VNI Conflict Manager with a list of applications with which they have, or may have, a Conflict of Interest and a description of the nature of that conflict. All Conflicts of Interest are to be recorded by the VNI Conflict Manager and are to be used by the EC Chair at the EC meetings.

c) Actual or potential Conflicts of Interest identified by reviewers will be recorded by the VNI Conflict Manager. Where an actual or potential conflict is identified, the funding application will be assigned to another reviewer.

d) At the EC meetings and prior to discussing each application, the following steps are to be taken:

- i. The Chair of the EC will announce the application ID and the names of the Investigators for the application to be discussed.
- ii. The Chair will announce the members that have already identified Conflicts of Interest with the application.
- iii. Members will then be given the opportunity to disclose any Conflicts of Interest not previously identified.
- iv. All Conflicts of Interest will then be discussed by the EC.
- v. The Chair will recommend the action to be taken.
- vi. EC members will discuss the recommended action.
- vii. After discussion, the Chair will make the final decision on the action to be taken regarding the Conflict of Interest. The decision will be recorded in the minutes.
- viii. EC members may withdraw from discussion of any application if they wish, despite the Chair's decision about the nature of any Conflict of Interest.
- ix. The EC will then commence discussing the application.

(e) After discussing each conflict of Interest, the EC may decide that:

- i. The member with conflicts must not be present during any discussion of the application; or
- ii. The member or reviewer has unique knowledge of the research area of the application and may only be present to answer direct questions relating to scientific issues, and is not to be present, or take any further part in the application review process; or
- iii. No action is deemed necessary.